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WHAT TRAINING DOES THE SUPERINTENDENT NEED IN HIS ELEMENTARY TEACHERS?

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Is any training at all essential?—A strange question to ask in this day and generation no doubt, and yet the supervising officer has occasion to ask himself the question many times. Publicly he feels bound to answer the question in the affirmative, but in the seclusion of his private meditations he has honest doubts. In most cases, he concludes that some kind of training must be essential, or at least desirable, but he wonders why his trained teachers so often fall short of the standard set by his untrained, experienced teachers. The reason for his hesitation is no doubt to be found chiefly in the principle that in all kinds of human contact personality must always loom so large as to obscure other elements of capacity; but it is only fair to say that his hesitation is also often justified by the failure of training institutions to equip their graduates with a thorough and practical grasp upon the entirely workable principles which are useful in the schoolroom.

We still have with us the conservative who smiles and says, "Oh, I don't believe in your cut-and-dried methods; teachers, like poets, are born, not made." Let us frankly acknowledge that the statement is at least a half-truth. No training can take the place of the native capacity for inspiration and clear teaching which we sometimes find. Some people are born teachers, just as some are born mechanics, or farmers, or physicians, or cooks. And quite similarly, some people are so lacking in native adaptation that no amount of training would ever make them into good teachers. But we know enough today about the distribution of all kinds of special gifts, or lack of gifts, to enable us to be entirely confident that there are not born teachers enough to equip the schools, and, further, that the number at the opposite end of the scale cannot be large enough to endanger the schools with native hopelessness. The truth is that the vast majority of people are wholly incapable of teaching effectively until they learn how to teach and that these people teach

very well indeed after they have learned how. One is not impressed, in visiting classrooms of any grade, with the large number of teachers who by any stretch of the imagination can be assigned to the genius class.

On the other hand, the teacher of today has many duties which are not instructional in character, such, for instance, as physical care of children, touch with child welfare work, various tests and measurements, knowledge of none of which is inherited.

This article proposes to discuss from the standpoint of the supervising officer what training products are valuable and useful, in the belief that such officers will require them whenever they can get them.

Adequate academic scholarship.—Nobody can teach what he does not know. More than that, in the long run, the teacher who knows at least as much about the subject being taught as the text in use contemplates, inspires in his pupils a peculiar respect. The bane of many schools, to put it bluntly, is in the fact that people who assume to teach, even in elementary school, do not know enough. Many normal schools are keenly conscious of the fact and devote so much of their limited time to reviews of academic work that they have no time left for professional preparation proper. The bona fide graduate of a reputable secondary school ought to know enough to teach an elementary grade. The difficulty in part seems to be that some normal schools are willing to accept secondary graduates whose principals would never venture to grant a college-entrance certificate, and in turn to pass along such students into the teaching profession. A further difficulty is often found in the fact that thoroughly good high-school graduates have often never studied at all the sciences and history and literature which are so peculiarly a necessity to the young person who is destined to meet the inquisitive minds of children in the elementary grades.

The remedy for the first difficulty suggests itself. For the second, the cure is probably in prevocational teaching courses which are already a feature of many secondary programs. It is plainly essential that normal schools should be able to limit their academic courses to those which are mainly methodological in character.

An elementary understanding of the educative process.—By this I do not mean a philosophy of education, nor yet a collection of

essays upon education. The young normal-school student cannot usually be expected to generalize upon data for the collection of which a lifetime is needed. On the other hand, she can find an insight into a notion of education as a process of growth in the individual, sufficient to make her capable of intelligent discrimination between what is education for the elementary pupil and what is not—enough, let us say, to enable her to picture to herself what the elementary school is or ought to be trying to do. Modern biology and psychology provide an abundance of data for such a course.

The educational technology of the grade taught.—There are several well-recognized duties of the modern school system which ordinarily are entrusted to corps of specialists, duties in the performance of which the regular teacher is an assistant rather than a principal. No person can be a really effective teacher, capable of contributing to the organized morale of the whole school system, unless she is equipped with a sufficient knowledge of the underlying principles and routine of these various extra-curricular activities to make her intelligent about them. Intelligent understanding is pretty apt to breed conscientiousness. Lack of understanding spells apathy. In the whole matter of medical inspection, for instance, there is a world of difference between the effectiveness of medical oversight in the room of the teacher who understands what it is all about and in that of the teacher who leaves it all to the school physician and nurse. Medical inspection, physical education, fire drill and fire prevention, child welfare, oversight of the sub-normal—all these activities find the understanding teacher their most effective aid and the teacher who “knows nothing about it” an irritating stumbling block.

And so the normal school which would graduate teachers who will in a practical sense justify their training will prescribe competent elementary courses in the common technology of the schoolroom. The writer suggests that there should be at least the following such courses:

1. The physical nature of the child and school hygiene, including the purpose and routine of medical inspection, school nursing, the dental clinic, etc., but not including the methodology of physical education which is properly a subject by itself.

2. The planning and sanitation of school buildings, including fire prevention and fire and panic drill.

3. The nature of feeble-mindedness, its social meaning, its appearance in the schoolroom, mental tests, needful procedure with feeble-minded children, character and purpose of institutional treatment.

4. The care of dependent children, including the legal definition of dependency in children, where such legal definition exists, and including particularly the public and private machinery provided for handling cases of juvenile dependency.

5. Similarly the care of juvenile delinquents, including study of the nature and causes of delinquency, proper methods, institutional and otherwise, of dealing with the delinquent child, and particularly the existing court and institutional machinery provided.

The public-school teacher is in a peculiarly important relation to the problems arising under 4 and 5. The school is the place in which all the child-welfare roads cross. The teacher is in a position to know sooner than most people when children begin to need public protection. If she is intelligent and keen about the matter, she is very likely to be able to prevent a world of suffering and crime; if she is ignorant of the whole matter, she is commonly apathetic, not only to the detriment of the school itself, but also to the sacrifice of one of the school's most conspicuous opportunities.

6. Apart from its courses in the applied psychology of the school subjects, the normal school ought to offer, as most schools do, a brief course in general psychology, in order to equip the graduate with an elementary insight into the nature of mental processes. This course has very commonly tended to become loaded up with a mass of material which belongs to the university graduate school if anywhere, and the tendency at present is perhaps to rush to the other extreme and eliminate general psychology altogether, which is unfortunate.

The methodology and technique of the grade or subject taught. Here is of course the point at which, in the superintendent's eyes, the professional school either succeeds or fails, for here it is that the student in training either learns to teach or does not learn. The plea that the normal school does not wish to teach any particular method, but only the "great fundamentals" will no longer hold. Time was when it would hold. That was the day of the widely exploited empirical devices for teaching reading or arithmetic or

what not. We have in the place of that empiricism today, a body of principles scientifically determined which gives us a generalized basis for the methodology of most of the schoolroom arts. So far as reading, writing, spelling, and the language arts in general are concerned, we are no longer interested in the A series of readers or the B spelling book, or the C system of writing. To a degree, the same thing is true of arithmetic. In effect, the normal school has for most of the subjects of the elementary school a teachable methodology.

Methodology is one thing and technique is quite another. Without the first, the teacher becomes an unintelligent routinist; without the second, she cannot teach. The young woman who comes to her task in a given grade with the best possible knowledge of the principles which govern effective and economical teaching in that grade will still have to learn how to teach unless she has learned the technique of teaching by practice in teaching. We musn't be surprised if the superintendent is not impressed by the scientific equipment of the methodologist who cannot teach.

Practice means practice schools where students can get the feel of the schoolroom and acquire the technique of teaching. Many of our great normal schools have failed to justify themselves as training schools for teachers, because their very size has made the practice school impossible. For a two-year training course, experience goes to show that a practice school with an enrolment not less than five times the enrolment of the training course is about the minimum. Since administrative problems in the conduct of practice increase very rapidly as the size of the practice school grows, it follows that effective normal schools calculated to furnish thorough and practical training for the teaching service in the elementary schools will ordinarily be small institutions, more often falling under five hundred students in enrolment than exceeding that number.

An essential feature of our growing science of methodology is the tests and measurements which are appropriate to the several schoolroom arts. The modern normal school can hardly justify itself unless it sends out its graduates not only taught the how and the why of the subject which they propose to teach, but also trained in the checking-up of the results of teaching and in the scientific diagnosis of the difficulties which from time to time present themselves.